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ABSTRACT

Faculty members employed at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) should give priority to teaching and learning. The work of faculty members at such institutions is a way to reclaim individuals who have been discarded by society. Mission statements should be reviewed to be sure that college printed materials do indeed reflect these goals. Faculty should change the way they think--about themselves, their institutions, and their performance. Suggestions are made as to how to recognize and encourage faculty effort through staff support, workshops, development opportunities, and salary increases. The paper also reports briefly on a teacher action research project that asked whether the perceived disparity between student and teacher expectations affected student success. One of the projects was about the teachers involved in the study became more committed to good teaching and learning and that they carried that commitment to subsequent classes. (CH)

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"MAKING A DIFFERENCE AS A FACULTY MEMBER: OUR HBCU'S RECOMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE"

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Making a Difference as a Faculty Member

Faculty members who make an affirmative and active choice to be employed at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) tend to subscribe to the belief that a significant contribution can be made to society by their work in those institutions. These faculty members believe in possibilities, in opportunities and in expectations. They believe that they can take less and do more and they believe they can undo any travesties which have been wrought as a result of inadequate public school systems. We, who actively choose to be there, know that we are making a difference. We know that our students are learning and we know that a significant part of their progress can be attributed to the fact that we believe in them and in our work and they know it and respond positively to it.

Some faculty members on our campuses are there because they feel as if they had no other choices because of the tight job market in higher education and the fierce competition for academic positions. Often these perceived limitations regarding themselves and the actual limitations of resources on HBCU campuses are enough to turn possibilities into improbabilities, opportunities into unsolvable problems and expectations into predictions of failure.

The challenge facing us is how can we ensure success in teaching for all faculty members which results in automatic and immitigable successes in learning for their students. My suggestion is that we should give teaching and learning priority on our

campuses. Some might say that we cannot do this, but, if we really study our campuses, we might be surprised to see that often the teaching and learning core of the campus is somewhat neglected but could be revived with just a few changes.

Most members of college and university communities would agree that the instructional program and the teaching faculty, notwithstanding the students, are the most essential element to the academic enterprise. They would also agree in principle that learning and effective teaching should be supported. Yet often when suggestions for improvements in the supports for academe are offered or requests for additional resources are made by the faculty to the persons who control resources on campuses, their requests for services, supplies and materials are often met with delays and irresponsiveness. Sometimes faculty work at college campuses is controlled and/or delayed by non-instructional offices. This failure to respond, with timeliness, to the needs of faculty for the instructional program is due in part to the delicate, easily disturbed nature of the infrastructures and to the unique webs of formal and informal communications and decision making systems of many colleges but especially HBCU's. Our infrastructures are often straining to respond to documentation and reporting requirements of funding agencies and to the increasing interests and requirements of accrediting bodies.

The observable lack of responsiveness to the needs of the instructional arm of higher education institutions also stems from the fact that instruction and support for instruction are not seen as the central and daily mission of colleges and universities by people other than students and faculty. Sometimes the attitudes and responses of

administrators and support staff in non-instructional buildings, corridors and offices to faculty needs are almost cavalier and enable those not involved in instruction to determine whether faculty members have chalk and erasers, adequate copying, textbooks, clean classrooms, and roll books. Someone outside the classroom determines the level of instructional technology that will be available, the computers and software programs to be used and the configuration of labs and classrooms which will be supported with technology.

Historically black colleges and universities have significantly large numbers of students who have come from less than adequate or supportive elementary and secondary systems which results in the fact that the faculties at HBCU's must be committed to the teaching of both pre-college and college material. But, more resources are needed for this because it takes experienced and well educated faculty to do this work and to see it as a challenge to be met which is vital to our nation. Faculty members at our institutions must see their work as a reclamation of thousands of persons who had been discarded by society because of their skin color and their neighborhoods.

On HBCU campuses we can make a difference by re-committing ourselves to our missions, by re-educating our faculty and staffs and by educating all of our students. Some few years ago the Council of Independent Colleges had its members to reexamine their missions and compare them with the documents about their colleges. Catalogues, brochures and other printed materials were scrutinized to see to what extent they espoused the missions of the colleges. Additionally, these colleges were asked to list the

values that they felt were the most important and to examine their print materials to determine which of these were included.

The results were amazing. Many of the important values as cited were not in printed materials and many mission statements did not incorporate or even allude to these values. Many important elements of the mission statements were not present in print materials. Do the mission statements of our HBCU's show our commitment to teaching and learning? Do our print materials state our most important values? Even more importantly, do we support teaching and learning on our campuses?

We can make substantial increases in teaching and learning by doing just a few things, some of which may change the way our faculty think of themselves, their institutions and their performances. First, we should develop some activities which recogn·e the efforts of faculty. It is not enough to just have a Teacher of the Year Award. Faculty members who make presentations at conferences and meetings should be recognized in our newspapers, news letters and magazines. Faculty members who sponsor co-curricular and extra-curricular activities should be recognized and perhaps given some additional remuneration. Faculty members who advise students should be given some remuneration. Development officers should be encouraged to work with faculty members to develop increasing opportunities for study tours and other opportunities for students to work along side faculty to practice what they have learned in the classrooms.

We can make a difference in how faculty feel if both if support staff are oriented to the academic enterprise through workshops so that not only do they faculty members with

respect but that they, themselves, become committed to the enterprise and begin to support it through their efforts. These support personnel need to be trained as part of the team so that they feel good about facilitating the efforts of faculty. Every employee of an HBCU needs to be involved actively in support of the mission of teaching and learning.

Certainly another way of enhancing the esteem of faculty on our campuses is to provide salary increases to faculty whenever possible. The faculty should not be the last group of personnel to get raises. Additionally, we should increase professional development opportunities for faculty. Every faculty member should attend at least one professional conference annually. The potential benefits to the institutions from these professional development opportunities are immeasurable.

Faculty members can make a difference on their campuses. They can foster a recommitment to excellence by demonstrating excellence in all their endeavors, by expecting and requiring excellence from their students and from their colleagues and by assisting in the education of non-instructional personnel to the important role they play when they support the instructional effort.

But, before faculty members at HBCU's can foster a recommitment to excellence and demonstrate excellence in all endeavors they must first believe that excellence is possible. That is, they must believe that effective teaching and learning can take place on an HBCU campus despite all the existent and/or possible mitigators to success. They must know as their teachers knew, that fancy laboratories, the latest textbooks, and the most technologically, outfitted physical plants do not ensure that morally fit, and professionally

satisfactory graduates will be the outcomes. Good teachers, knowledgeable in their subjects and who believe in their students' abilities to be excellent, override limitations every time.

Faculty members must imbue themselves with pride in their institutions and themselves. While these institutions, in most cases have less than adequate resources and facilities and students who have often been miseducated, they graduate able professionals who keep the realm of possibilities ever before us. When institutions have beautiful and technologically sophisticated physical plants, libraries with millions of volumes, students with the highest scores on college entrance exams and well paid faculty, the success of their students prior to and after graduation is almost a given.

However, few HBCU's have more than one of these success factors in operation. While we dream of establishing these factors on our campuses, we must teach daily without them and not feel as though we are irredeemably challenged. We should feel a deal of pride in being able to achieve success. We should expect our students to develop and to become as competent as they would be were they have to attended the best college preparatory schools in the nation. We must teach them while operating with the knowledge that they can learn, require them to go beyond their beginning capacities and excite them about the new possibilities that their ever developing knowledge bases are providing for them.

Our students should be reminded of the fact that in this nation, screens of opportunity for higher education are not limited to the brightest who are screened out by

sixth grade. In our country, a person can decide at 90 that he/she wants to go to college and, if that person has a high school education, verifiable by a diploma or a GED certificate, he or she can go to college. Our students must be given opportunities to see that education is a liberating agency and its product is knowledge. In order to become a member of the club of the college graduate, you must learn a discipline which can be applied to a profession and which can be verified through examination or licensing processes.

Faculty should require students to attend class, to be prompt, to meet deadlines, to do their best work, to communicate effectively in standard written and spoken English, to develop a professional look and demeanor and to think of themselves as persons with an opportunity to achieve instead of feeling and behaving as if they are victims. The disease of *excusitis* as evidenced by getting over and around rather than getting through must be cured by the new antibiotic called *production-cillin*. Although requirements and grading should be fair, students at HBCU's should not be given watered down curricula because they did not have good pre-college educations. They should be challenged to learn what is necessary so that they can become the best in their fields and compete with the best.

In the fall of 1994, a small group of faculty on our campus which included, yours truly, began a teacher action research group project with the hope that such an activity would result in better teaching and better learning. The basic question of the research was whether a perceived disparity between student and teacher expectations was a delimiter

of student success.

Included in the variety of techniques to gather data were: interviews, questionnaires, and journal writings. The questionnaires were qualitative and quantitative ranging from items which asked students to draw a picture of a classroom in which learning was taking place, to what qualities does a good teacher have. The results of the questionnaires were studied and an item analysis was done of the comparable items of student responses and teacher responses.

One significant result of this research was that it precipitated immediate change in teacher behavior with the intent of improving both teaching and learning. Regardless to actual and perceived disparities between student and teacher expectations, teachers became more committed to good teaching and learning. Each teacher involved began a more intensive and continuous reflective process which began to focus on what can I do better as a teacher to help my students learn more. Another immediate result is that it made each teacher in the project realize that the diversity of our students was not limited to pre-college preparation, age or ethnicity, but was widespread on many, many factors. This really was a positive influence, because the students could not be categorized. Each teacher realized that he or she had to present the material in such a way that these diverse factors in experience, education and circumstance were not causal in determining effective teaching and successful learning.

The net result of the project has been a committed improvement in instruction and materials by the teachers in the project for each subsequent class. The teachers have

become committed to reflective inquiry and active change to ensure that each of their students is successful. There is thought given to mastery learning at the college level; that good teaching can result in every student in the class making an "A" and that is acceptable, if each has mastered the material and has produced quality products. We have made a difference with our students by showing them that learning is possible at a level of excellence for all.

The ideas in this paper are not new, but they do speak to the fact that by the very nature of our institutions, we do make a difference and if we re-energize ourselves so that teaching and learning are more the focus of our endeavors, we will make a more effective and certain difference.